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Jewish eruv set for London

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Change to World



By Dominic Casciani
BBC News Online community affairs reporter



The first major area in the UK to be formally marked out with special Jewish boundaries is expected to go ahead despite a decade of concerted opposition.

The final details of the proposed "eruv" covering the heart of north London's Jewish community goes before decision makers in the coming days after years of negotiations.

An eruv defines the boundaries of a Jewish community and allows observant Jews to treat public space in the same ways as "private" space at home.

"I simply cannot think of anything more calculated to make people feel angry"

**Madeline Simms,
eruv opponent**

In practice, it means that observant Jews can carry out normal tasks during the Sabbath, such as the carrying of personal items like keys or even the pushing of a wheelchair or a pram.

Without an eruv, say supporters, a community that adheres to the Sabbath's restrictions finds itself restricted and fragmented.

Jewish communities maintain eruvs in scores of cities around the world, including New York, Boston, Sydney, Venice and Johannesburg.

BBC London
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Internet links:

The Sydney Eruv
The Chief Rabbi
The Boston eruv
Barnet Council
Jewish.co.uk

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Multicultural London

But they are not universally supported. One New York eruv became the centre of a major row last year when the different parts of the Jewish community were divided over its merits.

Opponents in London, Jewish or otherwise, say that the physical creation of an eruv - which can include some poles and wires - would be an imposition of a small part of the community's values on other groups, contrary to the nature of multicultural London.

The proposed north west London eruv covers the majority of the area's Jewish population in parts of Hendon, Golders Green, Finchley and Hampstead Garden Suburb.

The 11-mile perimeter is almost entirely defined by rows of houses, major roads, train lines or other landmarks.

What is an Eruv?

3,000 years old
Exist in every
Israeli town
200 other cities
worldwide
Not universally
supported

However, part of the perimeter would be marked with poles and wires where there are no existing landmarks.

Barnet Council has already given planning permission but delayed the go ahead until the style and colour of the posts and wires is agreed.

The poles, which bear no symbols, would be fixed into the pavement. Thin wire would connect them across roads, closing the perimeter.

Opposition

Madeleine Simms, an opponent of the eruv, said that the campaign against it would continue.

A secular Jew, Mrs Simms stressed that the campaign believed that no minority group should be allowed to impose its views upon others.

“

The last place that I want to put a pole in front of someone's windows. Am I mad? Of course I don't want to do this.

”

She predicted the eruv would ultimately create tension and bring little

Edward Black,
United Synagogue
Eruv Committee

benefit to those who support it.

"This is a free country and people can believe anything that they want," she told BBC News Online.

"The question that we have constantly asked is what happens when that belief infringes on the rights of others not to be party to that belief.

"It is quite wrong that residents should have to see these poles go up."

Northern Ireland 'lesson'

The proposal had been driven by a "small group of people", Mrs Simms went on.

"If we were to allow any group to do what they wanted, we would end up heading for the same kind of division that we see every day in Northern Ireland - and that should be a lesson to us all."

Mrs Simms said that many involved in the long campaign were now reluctant to air their views because of fears that they would be labelled anti-semitic.

"People feel that they can't speak out," she said. "I think that this is very sad.

"We should object to any action of this sort by any religion or sect, be it Jewish, Christian, Hindu or Muslim."

Edward Black, spokesman for the United Synagogue Eruv Committee, said that the scheme had been wholly misunderstood and inaccurately portrayed by opponents.

He said suggestions by some campaigners that poles would be placed in gardens were a "tremendous lie".

"There has been a lot of nit-picking over the detail, including the colour of the poles," said Mr Black.

"We don't actually care what colour they are - just as long as we can reach agreement and we can go ahead."

“
How would the
eruvists feel if
Christians declared
Golders Green to be
an evangelical action
zone in which
missionaries were
urged to buy
houses?
”

**Letter to the Jewish
Chronicle, 9 August
2002**

Mr Black said that the nearest that a pole would come to private property would be where it is placed in a pavement against a boundary wall, in the same manner as other street furniture.

"The last place that I would want to put a pole is in front of someone's windows. Am I mad? Of course I don't want to do this."

A spokesman for Barnet Council said that it expected to approve the poles within days. It added that last-minute objections had to be focused on this element rather than the merits of the eruv itself.

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